

Bright's Corner Country School

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Farm children attended country schools in Livingston County from the 1860s until about 1949. There were 299 country schools in Livingston County at one time. The original plan was to place a country school every two miles so children did not have to walk more than one mile to attend school.

Farming was so labor-intensive that most families had many children so they could help on the farm. It was common for farm families to have 10 or 12 children in the 1800s.

As farming became mechanized, the need for large families decreased dramatically. The number of farm children declined to the point that it no longer made sense to have separate country schools. Around 1948-1949, most of the country schools in Livingston County closed, and the remaining farm children attended schools in the nearest town. The old country school buildings were sold at auction around 1951. Many of these small buildings were converted to machine sheds or residential homes.

Bright's Corner country school was located one mile north of Fairbury on First Street, then about a half-mile west at the T-intersection. This building still stands in 2025.

Many of the 299 country schools in Livingston County were named after the farmer who owned the land on which the country school was built. In some cases, the school was named after a nearby large family where the children all attended the country school.

The origin of Bright's Corner's name is a fascinating story. This story began with the birth of David Bright in Maryland in 1775. He married Amy Stenise in Ohio in 1808. He was 33, and she was 24 when they married. They had seven children.

In the 1850 U.S. Census, David and Amy Bright lived in Licking, Ohio. Their son Amos Bright was 18 years old and lived with his parents. David Bright was a farmer.

Shortly after the 1850 Census, the Bright family moved to Avoca Township, north of Fairbury. Unfortunately, David Bright died in 1852 at the age of 77. He was buried in Avoca Cemetery. His wife, Amy Bright, died in 1865 at the age of 81, and she was buried with her husband in Avoca Cemetery.

Amos Bright, son of David and Amy Bright, married Mary Francis Wince in 1855 in Livingston County. David was 23, and Mary was 19 when they married. They had 10 children. Son Phillip S. Bright died in 1861 at only 21 days old. Son Alfred Bright died in 1877 when he was four years old. These two sons were buried with their grandparents in the Avoca Cemetery. Eight of the ten children lived to be adults. Bright's Corner country

school was likely named after the Amos Bright family, with eight of their children attending that school.

Sometime between the 1870 and 1880 Census, the Amos Bright family all moved to Bates County, Missouri. In the 1880 Census, Amos was a farmer in Bates County.

The first mention of Bright's Corner country school in a local newspaper was an August 1880 article in the Pontiac Sentinel. This article reported that Wallace Foster would be the teacher at Bright's Corner country school the following year.

The 1893 Livingston County Atlas shows a country school at Bright's Corner. This map shows that John Steidinger owned the 40 acres with this country school.

The 1911 Livingston County Atlas shows the country school was on 40 acres owned by B. S. Steidinger.

On February 17, 1911, Amos Bright died in Bates County, Missouri, at the age of 79. His wife, Amy Bright, died in 1914 at the age of 78. They were both buried in Woodfin Cemetery in Bates County.

After about 1930, the Blade and Pantagraph newspapers published stories about Bright's Corner country school. Usually, these were short articles about who the teacher would be for the upcoming school year. On May 2, 1931, the Pantagraph published a class photo of the students and the teacher at Bright's Corner country school. A few years ago, an original copy of this class photo was found in the estate papers of Cloyd J. Wilson (1918-2005). A colorized version of this class photo, along with the students' names and the teacher's name, is included with this article.

The April 28, 1951, Pantagraph reported that 11 country schools in the Fairbury area were sold at public auction. The Pantagraph list of all the country schools sold included Hawarth School, \$475, Frank Hines, Lakeside School, \$485, Roy Jacobs; Bright's Corner, \$445, Anna Armbruster; Brownville School, \$330, Carl Waldbreser; Bee Hive School, \$300, Howard Fugate; Potter School, \$1,653, Urban Steidinger; Temple School, \$1,325; Jonathan Munz; Frog Point School, \$1,730, Mrs. Annice Sutter; Vail School, \$725; Curtiss Deputy; Excelsior School, \$650, Herman Kilgus and Fry School, \$450. Homer Fry.

Anna Armbruster bought the Bright's Corner country school for \$445. This purchase amount would be equivalent to \$5,472 in today's dollars.

Determining how the Bright's Corner country school was a fascinating research journey. It turned out to be a case of a country school named after a large family in the 1870s that moved to Missouri after the children had finished attending country school.



Front row, left-to-right, Howard Freed, Helen Wilson, Arthur Fehr, Melba Wilson, Leo Duane Mehrkens, William Freed, Robert Gahwiler, and Gene Gahwiler. Second row, left to right, Dorothy Wilson, Junior Wilson, Junior Mehrkens, Elizabeth Fehr, Miss Goembel, Pauline Meister, William Frisby, Emma Meister, and Levina Fehr. The names came from the May 2, 1931, Pantagraph. Original photo from the Cloyd Wilson estate.

